

## **Real Stories of Young Entrepreneurs in Wisconsin**

**Name:** Madeline Black

**School & Grade:** 12<sup>th</sup> grade at Wildlands High School

**Business Name:** Vita Bona Jewelry

### **What inspired you to start your business? Tell us about your inspiration, your idea and how it became a reality.**

I started my jewelry making endeavors for the first time in the summer of 2002, when I participated in a basic jewelry making class. Besides that class, I never had any formal training. I was essentially self taught using books, tutorials, and help from family friends. In the three years following the class I produced pieces of jewelry left and right. Since I had so much jewelry accumulated, people seem to like my work, and I had quite an investment in beads and tools, I decided to begin selling my creations. Even though my work was not what you would call “professional grade” my friends and family were very supportive and bought my creations. Becoming more sophisticated in both design and construction, my jewelry pieces sold well at a local salon, women’s events at my church, and craft shows. I was especially thrilled when I received custom orders and repair requests. I was even recruited to make jewelry for a wedding party after the mother of the bride witnessed my jewelry at the 4-H fair. Between the ages of 12 and 15 I decided that making jewelry was not enough, so I began teaching jewelry making classes at 4-H Discover Days. All of these circumstances inspired me to start my business, Vita Bona Jewelry. I chose that name because in Latin, Vita Bona means “beautiful life”, which is part of my philosophy on jewelry; it makes life more beautiful.

I consider the summer of 2009 to be the official start of Vita Bona Jewelry, when I entered a Youth Business Plan Contest through Western Dairyland. The business plan that I entered included an outline of which products and services my business would offer and how I planned to use the prize money. I won the contest, \$500 to start my business and fee business counseling. With the grant money I was able to purchase sixteen complete sets of hand tools, thousands of beads and findings, tables, my website, and marketing materials.

After winning the contest I convinced the Chippewa Valley Museum and Totally Pampered Salon to hold my jewelry making classes. The Leader-Telegram featured my business in the Lifestyles section which resulted in tons of business and my classes being filled to the brim! News-18 also created excitement for my business by doing a newscast about me, the contest and Vita Bona Jewelry. Needless to say, all of this publicity was a wonderful blessing!

### **Describe your product / service, purpose / goals, features / benefits, unique selling point.**

The ambition of Vita Bon Jewelry is to enhance a woman’s God-given beauty inside and out.

Vita Bona Jewelry is profitable, threefold business that offers jewelry repairs, jewelry making classes, and custom-made jewelry. My repair service “gives jewelry a second chance”, my jewelry classes enable my students to “learn, create and enjoy” and my custom jewelry pieces “enhance intrinsic beauty”. These three markets work together to make my business profitable. My business is immediately set apart from my competitors who focus on making and selling jewelry, because I also offer repairs and classes. The publicity that I get from offering classes gives me the opportunity to sell more custom pieces and promote my repair service. These services also appeal to a wide range of the female population.

Vita Bon Jewelry is innovative because it addresses the needs and desires of many people. Repairs are contemporary and eco-friendly because they give women the option to have their jewelry repaired instead of throwing it out. Classes are innovative because, with the declining economy, women want to learn how to make things for themselves. Furthermore, classes encourage face to face interaction which is something that people long for in this digital age. Custom-made jewelry is creative because it allows women and girls to express their personality.

**Tell us about yourself and how you make your business succeed.**

My name is Madeline black. I just celebrated my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I am the founder and owner of Vita Bona Jewelry. I am the oldest of eight children and I was home educated up until my sophomore year when I enrolled in Wildlands, a project-based Charter School. Vita Bona Jewelry is a business about which I am passionate. My business has been successful and will continue to be because I am a person with integrity, commitment, perseverance, good communication skills, vision and an entrepreneurial spirit.

Throughout the journey of starting my business I have demonstrated the above qualities by learning new computer programs, learning new jewelry making techniques, enrolling in a college marketing class, seeking out places to teach my classes and sell my jewelry, keeping up with jewelry styles, and establishing my website. One of my favorite past times is to brainstorm new ideas for advancing my business, so that I will be able to reach more people.

I have also done an excellent job of creating and keeping my customers, because they keep coming back with their family and friends. I calculate my risks by trying out a class or style on a small group of women before taking the idea to a higher level. I also spend time researching products, price and quality before I order them. Being careful not to over-purchase, I order what I need and then use the money I make to further grow my business. I understand the concept that I need to spend money to make money. I have also done a good job of marketing myself and my business. I was sought out by Green Oasis Garden Center, because they desired to partner with Vita bona Jewelry.

The most prominent advancement for Vita Bona Jewelry has been partnering with Green Oasis Garden Center, a division of Greener Grass Systems Inc., in January of 2011. This partnership has helped my business to grow because I now have a building in which to teach and reach my customers. It has also helped Green Oasis to blossom because having Vita Bona Jewelry sets them apart from the rest of their competition. Green Oasis is the only green house in the area to offer beads, jewelry-making supplies and classes along with pre-made jewelry. This offers an additional venue for Green Oasis which allows it to still be profitable even in the off season. I am in charge of developing classes, writing a jewelry newsletter and other promotional materials and pricing. While working at Green Oasis I am able to be mentored by my boss who is a business and marketing expert.

Additionally, I consider designed jewelry for wedding parties in 2008 and 2011 to be great triumphs. I am also proud to say that I have repaired jewelry that women had received as gifts from their now deceased husbands. As word has spread about my repairs services, I have repaired jewelry for people in Florida, Virginia, and Minnesota. I consider these vents to be successes because they all advanced my knowledge of entrepreneurship, aided other people and business, enabled me to run my business at a higher level, and have caused Vita Bona Jewelry to benefit financially.

Because I was a minor when I started my business, some of the obstacles that I faced were not being old enough to have a checking account, lack of tax, financial and business knowledge and low funds. With the help and support of my parents, mentors and business counselor, I have learned much about managing a business, giving me the skills to overcome these and future obstacles.

**What are your future goals and vision for your business? How do you propose to develop your business?**

My goals is to continue operating Vita Bona Jewelry while earning my degree in marketing and entrepreneurship. I know that my ambitions will take hard work and determination to accomplish. However, because I possess the skills necessary and there is a market for jewelry, repairs and jewelry making classes virtually everywhere, it will be possible. Furthermore, the tools, technology and supplies needed to operate my business are small, thus I will be able to take them with me to school.

My scheme for expansion is to take my business to the internet, and develop effective marketing materials. I have already started to do this by designing a logo and developing a website and a Facebook page. I also plan to hire more jewelry making teachers and repairers as these services continue to become more popular. I would also like to develop video tutorials on jewelry making and compile kits to sell from my website. I have access to HD video cameras and advanced video editing software through my school to aid me in developing tutorials. My business counselor is web design savvy and will be able to help me advance [www.vitbonjewelry.com](http://www.vitbonjewelry.com).

Considering the fact that classes are high in demand, I have developed a vision which takes Vita Bona Jewelry, specifically classes, to a higher level. This expanded version would operate much like a "crafters gym", a place for people to "exercise their creative abilities". I picture a building, filled with clean, well-lit rooms stocked with supplies. Each room would be dedicated to a specific art or craft, such as jewelry, music, scrapbooking or woodworking, which patrons could utilize for creating their projects or local artists could utilize for teaching classes. The expanded Vita Bona Jewelry would also house a café, a stage, a materials store and a shop where local artists and crafters could sell their work on commission. Even though I am still in the dreaming stage, I believe that with the knowledge I will gain in college, practical experiences and hard work I can make my dream a reality.